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to his own matrimonial stock, and at his death his bones are deposited in the cromlech of his mother's kin. In Jowai he neither lives nor eats in his wife's house, but visits it only after dark (p. 76). In the veneration of ancestors, which is the foundation of the tribal piety, the primal ancestress (*Ka Iaïaw*) and her brother are the only persons regarded. The flat memorial stones set up to perpetuate the memory of the dead are called after the woman who represents the clan (*maïo kyntheï*, p. 130), and the standing stones ranged behind them are dedicated to the male kinsmen on the mother's side.

In harmony with this scheme of ancestor worship, the other spirits to whom propitiation is offered are mainly female, though here male personages also figure (pp. 106—109). The powers of sickness and death are all female, and these are those most frequently worshipped (p. 107). The two protectors of the household are goddesses (p. 112), though with them is also revered the first father of the clan, *U Thâwlang*.

Priestesses assist at all sacrifices, and the male officiants are only their deputies (p. 121); in one important state, Khyrim, the High Priestess and actual head of the State is a woman, who combines in her person sacerdotal and regal functions (p. 70).

The Khasi language, so far as known, is the only member of the Mŭn-Khmêr family which possesses a grammatical gender, distinguishing all nouns as masculine and feminine; and here also the feminine nouns immensely preponderate (p. 206). The pronouns of the second (*nâŋ*, *phâ*) and third person (*ŭ*, *kâ*) have separate forms for the sexes in the singular, but in the plural only one is used (*phâi*, *kâi*), and this is the plural form of the feminine singular.

It may perhaps be ascribed to the pre-eminence

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Syntengs plaster the space in front of the house with red earth and cow-dung, this custom being probably a remnant of Hindu influences. The Khasis have some peculiar customs when they build a new house. When the house is completed they perform a ceremony, *kynjah-kha-shain*, when they tie three pieces of dried fish to the ridge pole of the house and then jump up and try to pull them down again. Or they kill a pig, cut a piece of the flesh with the skin attached, and fix it to the ridge pole, and then endeavour to dislodge it. The Syntengs at Nartiang worship U *Bishnoom* (Bishwakarma) and *Ka Siem Synshar* when a house is completed, two fowls being sacrificed, one to the former, the other to the latter. The feathers of the fowls are affixed to the centre post of the house, which must be of a *diengsning*, a variety of the Khasi oak. The worship of a Hindu god (Biswakarma), the architect of the Hindu gods, alongside the Khasi deity *Ka Siem Synshar*, is interesting, and may be explained by the fact that Nartiang was at one time the summer capital of the kings of Jaintia, who were Hindus latterly and disseminated Hindu customs largely amongst the Syntengs. Mr. Rita says that amongst the Syntengs, a house, the walls of which have been plastered with mud, is a sign that the householder has an enemy. The plastering no doubt is executed as a preventive of fire, arson in these hills being a common form of revenge.

Amongst the Khasis, when a daughter leaves her mother's house and builds a house in the mother's compound, it is considered *seng*, or taboo, for the daughter's house to be built on the right-hand side of the mother's house, it should be built either on the left hand or at the back of the mother's house.

In Nongstoin it is customary to worship a deity called *u'Ki Iap* (Khasi, u phaw), by nailing up branches of the Khasi oak, interspersed with jaw-bones of cattle and the feathers of fowls, to the principal post, which must be of a *diengsning*. The Siem priestess of the Nongkrem State at Smit and the ladies of the Siem family perform a ceremonial dance before a large post of oak in the midst of the Siem priestesses' house on the occasion of the annual goat-killing ceremony. This oak post is furnished according to custom by the *lyngskor*

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or official spokesman of the Siem's Durbar. Another post
oak in this house is furnished by the people of the State.

The houses of the well-to-do Khasis of the present day in
Mawkhar and Cherrapunji are built after the modern style
with iron roofs, chimneys, glass windows and doors. In Jowai
the well-to-do traders have excellent houses of the European
pattern, which are as comfortable as many of the European
subordinates' quarters in Shillong. Some up-to-date families
in Shillong and at Cherra allow themselves muslin curtains
and European furniture.

The houses of the Pnar-Wárs are peculiar. The roof, which
is thatched with the leaves of a palm called a *tyrsiew*, is long
backed and the eaves come down almost to the ground. There
are three rooms in the Wár as in the Khasi house, although
called by different names in the Wár dialect. The hearth is
in the centre room. The houses are built flush with the ground
and are made of bamboos. In the Wár villages of Nongjri and
Umsinh there are small houses erected in the compounds of
the ordinary dwelling-houses called *ing lawid* (spirit houses).
In these houses offerings to the spirits of departed family ances-
tors are placed at intervals, this practice being very similar to
the more ancient form of Shintoism. In some Wár villages
there are also separate bachelors' quarters. This custom is in
accordance with that of the Naga tribes. There is no such
custom amongst the Khasi Uplanders. The Wár houses are
similar to those of the Pnar-Wárs, except that a portion of the
house is generally built on a platform, the main house resting
on the hill-side and the portion on the platform projecting
therefrom, the object being to obtain more space, the area for
houses in the village sites being often limited owing to the
steepness of the hill-sides.

The Bhoi and Lyngam houses are practically similar, and
may be described together. They are generally built on
fairly high platforms of bamboo, are frequently 30 to 40 ft.
in length, and are divided into various compartments in order
to suit the needs of the family. The hearth, which is of earth,
is in the centre room. There is a platform at the back of the
Lyngam house, and in front of the Bhoi house, used for drying
paddy, spreading chillies, &c., and for sitting on when the day's

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643 legacy being subject to the usual restrictions whatsoever. In a
651 few States the Siems are commencing to levy registration fees,
443 but the amounts are insignificant. Judicial fines are divided
between the chief and the members of the durbar. In some
States the Siems' incomes amount to a few hundreds a year
only. Generally speaking, the Khasi chiefs are necessarily a
643 very impecunious set of persons, and many of them are in-
631 debted to, comparatively speaking, large amounts. The Siem
is appointed from the Siem family, there being such a family
in each of the fifteen Khasi States. The most important
States are Khyrim, Mylliem, Cherra, Nongstoin, and Nong-
khlaw. There are a few other petty States presided over by
Lyngdohs, Sirdars, or Wahadadars. A fact which is of
material application is that heirship to the Siemship lies
through the female side. The customary line of succession is
uniform in all cases, except in Khyrim, save that in some
instances cousins rank with brothers, or are preferred to
643 paralongtuses, instead of being postponed to them. The
925 difference between the rule of succession and the rule of
inheritance to real property should be noted. In the former
case the sons of the eldest cousin sister inherit in order of
priority of birth, although it is true that this rule has some-
times been disregarded. In cases of succession to realty,
however, the inheritance goes to the youngest daughter of the
deceased's mother, and after her to her youngest daughter. In
successions to the Siemship, in the absence of male heirs from
the eldest sister the succession passes, by what has been aptly
described as the "knight's move," to the male children of
the next eldest sister. In Khyrim the custom of succession is
peculiar, there being a High Priestess, and heirship being
643 limited to her male relatives. Generally speaking, it would
644 appear that succession was originally controlled by a small
773 electoral body constituted of the heads (*lyngdohs*) of certain
priestly clans, who, it is presumed, exercised their authority
to reject candidates, when necessary, mainly on religious
grounds. There has, however, been a distinct tendency towards
the broadening of the elective basis. In the large State of
Khyrim the number of the electoral body has been greatly
increased by the inclusion of the representative headmen of
certain dolloings but not-possibly clans (hunters).

certain dominant but non-priestly clans (*mantris*). In other States the Council has been widened by the addition to it of village headmen (*ai dawa*), or the chief superintendents (*basnas*) of the village markets, tolls from which constitute the chief item in the public receipts of those States. A further step towards the recognition of the public will in the nomination of a Siem has been the introduction of popular elections, at which all the adult males vote. Such popular elections were very greatly due to the views held by Colonel Rivet, who was Deputy-Commissioner of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills from 1865 to 1877. These elections have been, in many States, an innovation which is hardly in accord with public sentiment, and in many cases the voters have done no more than confirm the selection of a special electoral body. It is, however, clear that the idea of popular elections is not one with which the people are unfamiliar, *e.g.* in Langrin State, where all the adult males customarily vote at an election of a Siem. Popular election has also been customary in the Nobosohpoh and Mawwai States, in cases where a special electoral body has been unable to agree upon a nomination, and also in Nongspung, if a Council of five *lyngdohs*, which has in this State authority to declare who is the rightful heir, but not to disqualify him, cannot come to an unanimous decision. The Siems are appointed by an assembly, or *durbar*, which will be described later. The chiefs, having been thus chosen by the *durbar*, which is supposed by the people to be an institution of Divine origin, are styled, *ki Siem u Blei*, or Siems of God. In most States the Siem is the religious as well as the secular head, *e.g.* in the Cherra State, where the Siem is also *lyngdoh*. In Khyrim State the Siem has sacerdotal duties to perform at different religious ceremonies, especially at the time of the annual Nongkrem dance. It is the custom for the Siem to consult the augurs with the entrails for the good of the State. The Siem in matters judicial acts as a judge, the whole body of the *durbar* being the jury. In olden days the Siem marched to war at the head of his army. It is not customary to recognise an heir-apparent, and the young men of the Siem family pursue the ordinary avocations of a Khasi, not comporting themselves in the least like scions of royalty. In quite

Customs which the Siem -- Analysis

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recent years there have been instances of Siems having been summoned, like the Roman Cincinnatus, from quite humble positions, to undertake the duties of chief. We will now turn to an examination of the systems in the different Siemships. In the Kyrim or Nongkrem State there is a spiritual head, i.e. a High Priestess, *Ka Siem Sad*, who is responsible for the due performance of the State religious ceremonies, although, as already stated, the Siem also performs some of these duties. The temporal power here is delegated by the High Priestess to a Siem, who is her son or her nephew, or occasionally some more distant male descendant. It is the duty of an official called a *lyngdoh*, who is the official spokesman of the Siem's *durbar*, to propose a new Siem to the six *lyngdohs*, or priests, and to the heads of the twenty-four *mantri* clans. The latter then decide in *durbar* whether the proposed Siem should be appointed. In the event of their disapproving of the *lyngdoh's* nominations they proceed to elect another Siem. The High Priestess is appointed by the above electors, the order of succession to the post being as follows:—she is succeeded by her eldest surviving daughter; failing daughters, by the eldest daughter of her eldest daughter; failing daughters of her eldest daughter, by the eldest daughter of her second daughter, and so on. If there are no daughters or grand-daughters, as above, she is succeeded by her eldest sister. In the absence of sisters, she is succeeded by the eldest daughter of her mother's eldest sister, and so on. In this State the tradition runs that the first High Priestess was Ka Pah Syntiew, i.e. the flower-lured one. Ka Pah Syntiew was a beautiful maiden who had as her abode a cave at Mataï, near Nongkrem, whence she was enticed by a man of the Mylliem-ngap clan by means of a flower. She was taken by him to be his bride, and she became not only the first High Priestess, but also the mother of the Siems of Nongkrem.* In Nongkrem the electors may disqualify the first, or any, heir to the Siemship for sufficient reason according to the Khasi religion and custom, such as bad character, physical disability, change of religion, &c. If the first heir be disqualified, the next in order must be appointed Siem, unless he be disqualified, and so on. In this State there

* For the story in detail see the Folk-lore section of the monograph.

the War country, it will be necessary to describe the land tenures and laws regarding land of each of these divisions separately. As land is always *jhoomed* by the Bhois and Lyngams from year to year, customs regarding land with these people are naturally very simple. Taking land in the high plateau of the Khasi Hills first:—The lands are classified under two main divisions, (a) public and (b) private lands. The following are the different descriptions of lands in the first division:—

Ka ri Raj, or *ka ri Siem*, which are Siem's, or Crown lands. These lands are intended for the support of the Siem family, and they cannot be alienated. The Siems are, however, precluded by custom from levying a land tax on persons who cultivate such lands, the relation of landlord and tenant between the latter and their chiefs being unknown.

Ka ri Lyngdoh.—These lands are for the support of the Lyngdohs or priests of the State. In some Siemships, as in Mawiang Siemship, paddy is grown on these lands from which rice is obtained for the State pujas.

Ri shnong, or village lands.—These lands are set apart to provide a supply of firewood, thatching grass, &c., and are the property of the village. The inhabitants of other villages are not allowed to enjoy the produce of such lands. Such lands can be cultivated by ryots of the village, but the latter possess only occupancy rights, and cannot transfer them.

Ki law lyaiong.—These are sacred groves, situated generally near the summit of hills, composed of oak and rhododendron trees, which are held sacred (*lyaiong*), it being an offence, or *sang*, for any one to cut timber in the grove, except for cremation purposes. These groves are the property of the villages.

(b.) Private Lands. These may be subdivided into *ri-kur* or lands which are the property of the clan, and *ri kynti*, or family, or acquired landed property. In the Khasi Hills proper a very large proportion, certainly of the high lands, is the property of the clan; for instance, the high lands at Laitkor, which are the property of the Khar kunger and Kur kulang clans, whose ancestors the large memorial stones close to the Laitkor road commemorate, also the lands of the Thang Khew clan, and many others.

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SECTION IV.

RELIGION.

GENERAL CHARACTER OF POPULAR RELIGION.

The Khasis have a vague belief in a God the Creator, U Blei Nongthaw, although this deity, owing, no doubt, to the influence of the matriarchate, is frequently given the attributes of the feminine gender, cf., Ka Iei Synshar. The Khasis cannot, however, be said to worship the Supreme God, although it is true that they sometimes invoke him when sacrificing and in times of trouble. The religion of the Khasis may be described as animism or spirit-worship, or rather, the propitiation of spirits both good and evil on certain occasions, principally in times of trouble. The propitiation of these spirits is carried out either by priests (*Iyngdohs*), or by old men well versed in the arts of necromancy, and as the *Iyngdoh* or wise man deals with good as well as evil spirits, and, as often as not, with the good spirits of ancestors, the propitiation of these spirits may be said to partake of the nature of Shamanism. A very prominent feature of the Khasi beliefs is the propitiation of ancestors; but this will be described separately. There is a vague belief amongst the Khasi of a future state. It is believed that the spirits of the dead, whose funeral ceremonies have been duly performed, go to the house or garden of God, where there are groves of betel-nut trees; hence the expression for the departed, *ubo lum kwai ha ûing u blei* (he who is eating betel-nut in God's house), the idea of supreme happiness to the Khasi being to eat betel-nut uninterruptedly. The spirits of those whose funeral ceremonies have not been duly performed are believed to take the forms of animals, birds, or

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cess. The Khasi word for consulting the omens is *khaw*, and a diviner is called a *nongkhaw*. Another method of obtaining omens is by dropping two leaves into a pool of water or on a stone, the position of the leaves as they fall, either right side uppermost or upside down, signifying good or evil as the case may be; this is called *khaw-sla*.

PRIESTHOOD.

The Khasi priest is usually called *Lyngdoh*, or *longdoh*; he is always appointed from the lyngdoh clan. The etymology of the word *lyngdoh* is said by certain lyngdohs of the Khynriam State to be *lang*=together and *doh*=fish. A *lyngdoh*, or *longdoh*, is one who collects sacrificial victims, i.e. fish for the purpose of sacrificing. It must be confessed, however, that this definition is doubtful, owing to the absence in the word *lyngdoh* of the prefix *nong* which in the right of the agent in Khasi. Besides *lyngdohs* there are persons called *sah-khia* or *sah-sla*, who may also be said to be priests. The Khasis, unlike the Hindus, have no *purohit* or priest to perform the family ceremonies. Such duties fall to the lot of the head of the family or clan, who carries them out generally through the agency of the *kni*, or maternal uncle. Old Khasis are frequently well versed in the details of sacrifices, and in the art of obtaining omens by examining the viscera of sacrificial victims. Apart from family and clan sacrifices, there are the sacrifices for the good of the State or community at large: it is these sacrifices that it is the duty of the *lyngdoh* to perform. He may be said to be the priest of the communal religion, although he has certain duties in connection with offences committed against the social law of marriage, and with regard to the casting out of evil spirits from houses which may be thought to be infested with them. The lyngdohs of the Khasis may be likened to the Roman *pontifices*. In the different Khasi States there is, as a rule, more than one *lyngdoh*: sometimes there is quite a number of such priests, as in Nongkhrem where there is a *lyngdoh* for each *raj* or division of the estate. There are a few Khasi States where the priest altogether takes the place of the Siem, and rules the community with the help of his elders in addition to perform-

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ing the usual spiritual offices. The duties of *lyngdoh*, their methods of sacrificing, and the gods to whom they sacrifice, vary in the different Siemships, but there is one point in which we find agreement everywhere, i.e. that the *lyngdoh* must be assisted at the time of performing sacrifices by a female priestess, called *ka sob-kha*, *ka sob-sla*, or simply *ka lyngdoh*. This female collects all the puja articles and places them ready to the *lyngdoh's* hand at the time of sacrifice. She merely acts as her deputy when sacrificing. The female *sob-kha* is without doubt a survival of the time when, under the matriarchate, the priestess was the agent for the performance of all religious ceremonies. Another such survival is the High Priestess of Nongkrem, who still has many religious duties to perform; not only so, but she is the actual head of the State in this Siemship, although she delegates her temporal powers to one of her sons or nephews, who thus becomes Siem. A similar survival of the ancient matriarchal religious system is the *Siem sad*, or priestess, at Mawryngan, who, on the appointment of a new *Siem* or chief, has to assist at certain sacrifices. Here we may compare Karl Pearson's remark, when dealing with matriarchal customs, that "according to the evidence of Roman historians, not only the seers but the sacrificers among the early Teutons were women." The duties of the *lyngdoh*, as regards communal worship, consist chiefly of sacrificing at times of epidemics of cholera, and such-like visitations of sickness (*jing iap khlem*). In the Khyrim State there is a goddess of each *raj*, or division, of the state, to whom sacrifices are offered on such occasions. To the goddess are sacrificed a goat and hen, powdered rice (*u lyer*), and a gourd of fermented liquor; the leaves of the *diengsning*, or Khasi oak, are also used at this ceremony. The *lyngdoh* is assisted by a priestess called *ka sob-sla*, who is his mother, or his sister, or niece, or some other maternal relation. It is the duty of the priestess to prepare all the sacrificial articles, and without her assistance the sacrifice cannot take place. Sacrifices are also performed by the *lyngdoh* to a *Lei Lyngdoh*, alias a *Rngaiew*. This used to be the tutelary deity in times of war, but in less troublous times the Khasi *lyngdoh* sacrifices to him for success in tribal or State litigation. A pig and a cock, with the usual accessories, are sacrificed by the

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793 lyngdoh to this god. As in the case of sacrifices to *Ka lei*
794 *Siej*, the services of a priestess are indispensable.

A *lyngdoh* is a *lyngdoh* for life. When a lyngdoh dies and his successor is appointed, certain rather elaborate ceremonies are observed in the Nongkrem *raj* of the Khyrim State. The 793 funeral ceremonies of the old *lyngdoh* having been completed, 535 the *lyngdoh* then appoints his successor. The latter then, 792 after performing his ablutions, proceeds, accompanied by the assembled members of the *lyngdoh* clan, to the top of the Shillong Peak. The lyngdoh and his clansmen advance along the road dancing, this dancing being carried on all the way from the *lyngdoh's* house to the Shillong Peak. All are clad in the distinctive Khasi dancing dress. Having reached the Peak, they pick the leaves of a tree called *ka 'la phlah*, which they spread on the ground. A goat and a cock are then sacrificed, the new *lyngdoh* acting as the sacrificer. There are the usual accessories, including branches of the Khasi *sning* or oak. Nine portions (*dphlet*) are cut from different parts of the victims and are offered to the god of the Shillong Peak, *U lei Shillong*. The *lyngdoh* and his companions then perform elaborate *puja* to the god, and the lyngdoh walks backwards some paces. The *puja* is then over, and they return dancing to the lyngdoh's house. On another day the *lyngdoh* performs a *puja* to *u lei Lyngdoh*, alias *u Ramjah*. Undoubtedly the most interesting feature of the ceremonies on these occasions is the dancing. This dancing is carried out by the *lyngdoh* and his companions armed with sword and shield, a fly-flap made of goat's hair (*symphiah*) being also sometimes held in one hand, a quiver of arrows being slung on the back, and a plume of black and white cocks' feathers (*u thaya*) fixed in the turban. The dance is executed in a regular figure, the dancers advancing and retiring in an orderly and methodical manner, and finally clashing their swords together in mock combat. The dance of the present day is not unlikely the survival of a war dance of ancient times. The lyngdohs say they dance in honour of *U lei Lyngdoh*, to whom such dances are thought to be pleasing. The dance of the lyngdohs on these occasions may be compared with that of the Roman *salii*, who, in the month of March, performed a war dance in honour of Mars.

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The above and other similar sacrifices to the gods of the State or divisions of the State may be said to be the communal religious duties of the *lyngdohs*. The duties of *lyngdohs* with reference to private persons may now be mentioned. When it is found that any two people have made an incestuous marriage, that is to say a marriage within the exogamous group of the *kur*, or clan, the parties at fault are taken before the *lyngdoh* by their clansmen, who request him to sacrifice in order to ward off the injurious effects of the *seng*, or taboo, of such a connection from the kinsfolk. On this occasion a pig is sacrificed to *u'lei lyngdoh* and a goat to *ka lei long raj*. The parties at fault are then outcasted. As mentioned in another place, the sin of incest admits of no expiation for the offenders themselves. In the Khyrim State, it is said by the *lyngdohs* themselves, although not by the Siem or the myntries, that they are the reversionary legatees of all the persons who die without leaving female heirs (*iap duh*). In other Siemships such property passes to the Siem. The *lyngdoh* of Nongkrem can also take possession of the property of persons who have been found to harbour an evil spirit (*jingbih*) in their houses. It appears that in such cases the house and furniture are burnt, as in the case of the *Tarah* superstition in the Jaintia Hills, the *lyngdoh*, however, taking possession of jewellery or anything else of value. The only practical service the *lyngdoh* renders in return is to build the afflicted person a new house; unless, indeed, we take into account the casting forth of the devil by the *lyngdoh*. Mr. Jenkins, of Shangpung, in the Jaintia Hills, writes: "Such is the belief of the people in the evil spirits, that they are completely under the influence of the priests and spend large sums of money in order to secure their favour. They live in constant dread lest by the least transgression or omission they should offend these avaricious men and so bring upon themselves the wrath of the demons." The influence of the *lyngdohs* over the people in the Jaintia Hills seems to be stronger than in the Khasi Hills. For instance, it came to my notice in Rallang that crops cannot be cut until the *lyngdoh* has seen them, in other words, until the *lyngdoh* has claimed and obtained his share of the produce. In many places, however, in the Khasi Hills the *lyngdoh* is much dis-
-credited, owing, no doubt, to the influence of Christian education.

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582 marry any one belonging to your own *kur*, or clan. Unlike the
614 Khasis, however, a Lyngam can marry two sisters at a time.
595 The Lyngam marriages are arranged by *keiangs*, or go-betweens,
594 much in the same way as Khasi marriages; but the ritual
582 observed is less elaborate, and shows a mixture of Khasi and Garo customs (see Section III.). The Lyngams intermarry
583 with the Garos. It appears that sometimes the parents of girls exact bride-money, and marriages by capture have been heard of. Both of these customs are more characteristic of the Bodo
581 tribes of the plains than of the Khasis. There are no special birth
762 customs, as with the Khasis, except that when the umbilical cord
553 falls a fowl is sacrificed, and the child is brought outside the house. Children are named without any special ceremony.
764 The death customs of the Lyngams have been described in Section III. A peculiar characteristic is the keeping of the dead body in the house for days, sometimes even for several months, before it is burnt. The putrefying corpse inside the house seems to cause these people no inconvenience, for whilst it remains there, they eat, carry on their ordinary avocations, and sleep there, regardless of what would be
771 considered by others an intolerable nuisance. The religion of these people consists of a mixture of ancestor-worship and the propitiation of the spirits of fell and fell, which are, most of them, believed to be of evil influence, as is the case with other savage
776 races. As with the people of Nongstoin, the primaeval
782 ancestress, "*Ka Iaw kei*," is worshipped for the welfare of the clan, a sow being sacrificed to her, with a gourd of rice-beer, and leaves of the oak, or *diengsning* tree. The leaves of the oak are afterwards hung up inside the house, together with the jaw-bone of the pig. Sacrifices are offered to a forest demon, *U Bangjong* (a god who brings illness), by the roadside; also to *Ka Miang Bylli U Majyrmaw*, the god of cultivation, at seed time, on the path to the forest clearing where the seed is sown. Models of paddy store-houses, baskets and agricultural implements are made, sand being used to indicate the grain. These are plowed by the roadside, the skulls of the sacrificial animals and
793 the feathers of fowls being hung up on bamboos about the place
796 where the sacrifice has been performed. There are no priests or *Iyngdoh*, the fathers of the hamlet performing the various cere-

[771] rather a reconciliation of the spirits, good as
782 well as bad, by sacrifices, which are offered occasionally, especially in times of distress."

Undoubtedly sacrifices belong to the practice of the Khasi religion. Now who offers these sacrifices? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to differentiate between the various sacrifices that are customary among the Khasi. We find there

a) public sacrifices,
b) private sacrifices,
c) secret sacrifices,

The public sacrifices are performed by specially designated persons of the male sex (lyngdoh).

Private sacrifices can be performed by the ordinary men of the people as well as by sacrificers (lyngdoh) specifically designated for this.

Secret sacrifices are offered by anybody of the masculine or feminine sex.

782 The Khasi do not have priests in the actual
• 798 sense of the word. There is also no caste or family from which the sacrificers would come. There is also no special school or training for beginning sacrificers. The sacrificers or lyngdoh have also no special mark of distinction. (3) To be a lyngdoh does not mean [212] having

3. Cf. P. Dr. C. Becker, Indisches Kastenwesen und christliche Religion [Indic Caste System and Christian Religion], (Aachen) p. 6.

a special profession. The sacrificers are ordinary people who may have any profession which they practice. Such men only appear occasionally as sacrificers. Even the chief sacrificers, who

782 preside over a whole district and are known as
793 lyngdoh rangbah (head sacrificer), are not sacrificers by profession. Thus, for example, the chief sacrificer of Lamin in the district of War is a coolie by trade and carries loads from one market to the other (Fig.1).[1] None of these sacrificers has a revered position among the people. It is rather the "fear" of them which makes them respected. For the Khasi firmly believe that the lyngdoh or even merely the ordinary sacrificers are masters over the (evil) spirits. Therefore they are very careful not to quagrel with the sacrificers, so that they will not conjure up spirits in their anger and set them on the guilty one and thus bring him to destruction.

782 The sacrificers are not actually offerers
596 of sacrifices in the strict sense of the word,
793 but only representative people at the sacrifice. For the Khasi live under a matriarchy. With a sharpness of logic and with thoroughness they have probably developed and put into effect as a social organization the most beautiful pattern of a matriarchy of anyone up to today. The mother is the head of the family, the only tie that gives the family unity; she is the sole possessor and sole owner of all property, and inheritance is only possible through her. The father has no right to the relationship of the children. These belong only to the maternal line. Even his ashes will not rest finally beside those of his wife or children, but in the grave of his mother. Whatever the father may earn or save does not belong to his children, but returns to the maternal line. It is not surprising that with such views it is also the mother who has all the spiritual power. And in reality she is in complete possession of the highest spiritual power. It is her duty to

[1] [See category 116, p. 10 -- Analyst]

792 preserve the customs of the family or sib; she
674 must see to it that the ancient domestic customs
793 of the household sacrifices are truly preserved;
it is her duty, to keep the inherited ceremonies
of the sacrifices pure and to hand them down
conscientiously to the descendants. Therefore
she has to arrange for the necessary sacrificial
materials; she must prepare everything; she is
the only one who must fast before the offering
of many a sacrifice; she gives the order for the
sacrifice, and she should also have to perform
it herself.

But this does not happen. In reality no
woman offers the sacrifice herself. (4) She is

4. With the exception of the secret sacrifices, about which, see later.

[604] represented by a male person. But he must be
related to her on the maternal side. Usually a
maternal uncle (kni) represents her. Such
representation by a relative is always necessary,
whether it be for a public or a private sacrifice.
But not merely the degree of relationship must
lie in the feminine line; there is still something
else that must be observed for each sacrifice.
Even though the duties of the sacrificers and
their methods of sacrificing are very different
and are arranged according to the customs and
inherited usages in the family or in the sib
or in the state or community, yet in one point
they are all similar: namely, all the sacrificers
must be assisted by a woman during the perform-
ance of the services referred to. She is simply
called ka lyngdoh (the priestess). [213] Be-
cause the man must function in her name and he
is only her representative at the sacrifice,

782 Gurdon (5) believes that his ka lyngdoh is with-
576
793

5. Gurdon, The Khasi, loc. cit.

out doubt a holdover from that time of the matriarchy in which a priestess also performed the sacrifices herself.

b) The Public and Ceremonial Introduction as a Lyngdoh.

793 How does a person become a lyngdoh?[1] This
782 question can also not be answered so easily.
555 This is very different in the different districts. In general it may be assumed that the lyngdoh arise from the practice of household (private) sacrifices. Since it is the duty of the woman to watch over the sacrificial ceremonies, she will introduce one of her sons to the rite of performing sacrifices that is peculiar to the family, so that he will be able to occasionally offer the sacrifice in the prescribed manner or in case of need (sickness, death, misfortune). But because the maternal uncle is usually called upon for the sacrifices, the son who has learned to offer sacrifices will have little chance to practise this art in his own family, but rather among his maternal relatives. And the other way around, people from there who know how to offer sacrifices will be called into this household. In this way the man who offers sacrifices becomes known in the neighborhood. If he has luck with his arrangements and if success crowns his efforts, the news will spread that he is an experienced sacrificer whom the spirits obey and that he knows how to seek them out, to drive them away, or to propitiate them, as the case requires. Thus it happens that such a man is called upon again and again to offer sacrifices,

[1 i.e. sacrificer--Analyst]

793 782 555 especially in touchy cases. Thus of his own accord he becomes a lyngdoh and the people recognize him as such on the basis of his successes. Whoever is once esteemed a lyngdoh remains one for the rest of his life. Just as in our country ordinary people call a dental technician "Doctor" and a high school teacher "Professor." so the Khasi call a man who is well known for his good sacrifices their "lyngdoh," although this person would not be able to prove his right to the title officially. This way of becoming a lyngdoh is probably the usual practice in most of the cases.

793 782 But it is not the way everywhere. There is a report from Lamin (6) that a group mother

6. Salvatorianische Mitteilungen /Salvatorian communications/, 1906 No. 6, p. 84.

/Stammesmutter/ of the lyngdohs is there. Gurdon (7) also writes about a lyngdoh tribe, from which

7. Gurdon, loc. cit.

the lyngdohs are drawn. I have never found this to happen and I have never heard of a lyngdoh group /Stamm/, or a lyngdoh sib (jaid). It could certainly happen that several sons of one and the same mother could by chance learn how to sacrifice and that they all excel in it and that they all have good luck so that these brothers are all called in as lyngdohs.

But the mother concerned has by no means become a lyngdoh group mother /Stammesmutter/ just because of that, and the sib involved has no claims to the title: Lyngdohjaid (lyngdoh group /Stamm/). Naturally the correct art of sacrificing, which is often very involved and difficult,

782 is more easily handed on through the children
• 783 than outside of the family, although that can also occur. But this teaching each other would never be a justification for a community or group /Stamm/ relationship of lyngdohs.
/214/ In those Khasi territories in which the lyngdoh are still installed by public recognition so that they may function as lyngdohs during great community or state sacrifices, it is done in the following or in a similar way.

If a certain man has been decided upon to be chosesn as lyngdoh for the district, for the community, or for the kingdom, he is invited to offer his first official sacrifice. First of all he must take a purification bath. Then he must go to the top of a nearby mountain with all his relatives or electors (who are usually his relatives). This is done with great ceremony. The new lyngdoh is festively dressed. Freshly washed clothes cover his body. His turban (jingspong) is decorated with white rooster feathers. He wears a leather belt around his body on which the short Khasi quiver hangs (ka ringkap). He has a long sword (ka waitlam) in one hand and a dancing brush of goat hair (u symhiah) in the other. The male escorts are also dressed like him, but instead of the white rooster feathers they have a bunch of bright colored (thuia) flowers on their turbans. The entire distance from the house of the new lyngdoh up to the top of the mountain must be covered by dancing, which explains the ceremonial dancing clothes of the male escorts. But also the female participants in the parade, who do not have to dance, insist on appearing all dressed up even if they are not in dancing clothes. They are also dressed in freshly washed clothes. A snow white scarf on their heads and a sky-blue cloak marks t hem from a distance as participants in the festivities. In addition most of them wear the usual Khasi ornament: chains of

773 782 gold and silver, of gilded beads alternating with real beads of coral. The women and girls also take some light refreshments along. They take care of the necessary pauses for quais (betel nuts) and smoking, for the Khasi are never in a hurry. Several coolies, who accompany the procession, carry the necessary utensils for the sacrifices on their backs in waterproof woven baskets (ka shang) with forehead straps (u star) woven of bamboo, while other coolies lead the living animals to be sacrificed: a goat and a rooster.

When everything is ready, a little band, consisting usually of only a flute player (ka 'tangmuri) and one or two drummers (ksing), begins to play and the procession moves up the mountain dancing. It proceeds slowly. From time [276] to time everybody rests and the coconut pipe (ka jingdih duma) is passed from mouth to mouth. After a bite of betel nut (quai) has been taken, the procession moves on again dancing until the top of the mountain is reached. The Khasi must be known and admired because of the quietness and cheerfulness with which they do everything. There is no hurrying and haste, no rushing back and forth and no forgetting of anything. They give themselves time for everything and therefore succeed in what they attempt.

Hopping, mincing, and skipping they reach the top. If there are Khasi oak's there, the ones who have arrived break off leaves from them and strew them on the ground. Otherwise the Khasi oak leaves are brought along from home so that they can be strewn on the ground on the top of the mountain. This makes the ground holy and consecrated to the spirits. The men now put aside the swords and the dancing brush. They begin to prepare the first ceremonial sacrifice

793 of the new lyngdoh. A hole is dug anywhere in
792 the ground with a chopping knife (ka wait) and the humus (earth or loam) which is dug out is brought to the middle of the place, piled up and thus serves as the altar. [215] A gourd bottle with fermented rice water is placed on the altar beside a bunch of betel nut leaves and beside a little basket full of rice and pounded meal next a pepper leaf, and the whole is surrounded by leaves of the Khasi oak trees.

Now a circle is formed. Several men lead the goat into the ring and hold it tight by a rope. Another man seizes the goat by the hind-feet and lifts these so high that the goat is only standing on its forefeet, and since it is tied by a rope it cannot move easily.

Now the new lyngdoh steps forward. He steps in front of the sacrifical animal, head high and armed with a chopping knife (ka wait). He folds his hands and takes the chopping knife between the flat surfaces of his hands. Then he crouches down, while murmuring his verses. Everything is still around him. The lyngdoh prays, i.e., he murmurs something which is not understood, yet everyone knows that he is now speaking to the spirits. After he has done this, he stands up. Taking the chopping knife by the handle with both hands, he swings it high and cuts off the goat's head with one blow. Blood shoots out in a wide arc. The body of the animal falls sideways to the ground. [Fig. 1. The chief sacrificer of Lamin in his private occupation as a coolie]. A cry of joy bursts from the throats of the crowd when the neck is severed. Raising himself up from the blow, the lyngdoh presents the bloody knife towards all sides and then hands it over to someone else. Now he picks up the severed head from the ground and lets the blood drip on the altar and on the sacrifical

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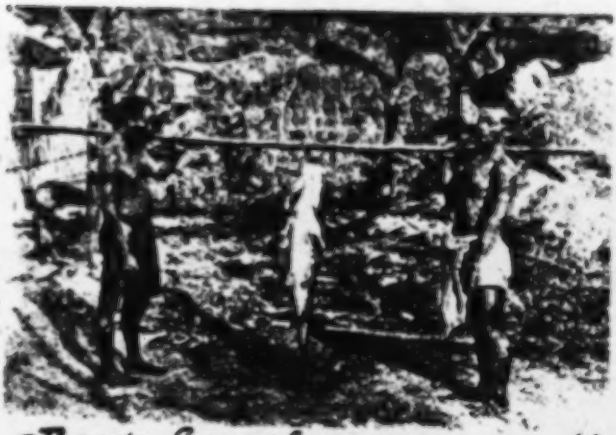

[The chief sacrificer of Lamin in his private occupation as a coolie]

Fig. 1

793 gifts carefully placed there. Finally he sets
982 the goat's head on the top of the little pile of earth thereby flattening it out, and thus crowns the altar with the bloody head.

Now the body of the goat is dragged over and the new lyngdoh begins to divide it. He has certainly done this many times before when he offered private sacrifices, or perhaps when he offered sacrifices for his own family, or perhaps when he was called upon by others to perform such sacrifices. But this time he is particularly happy about it. After all it is the first ceremonial sacrifice which he is performing officially. This is not as it usually is when he must sacrifice for sick or dying people and must propitiate the spirits and perform the observation of the entrails very precisely. No, this is a sacrifice of joy. He only needs to place the nine prescribed parts on the altar. He does that, taking a piece of the liver, the heart, the lungs, the kidneys, the loin, the spleen, the gall bladder, [216] the small intestine and the large intestine. The others surround the bloody parts with leaves of the Khasi oak trees and the new lyngdoh shouts out joyfully: "The sacrifice is good!" The others repeat the cry and clap their hands as a sign of agreement. The goat is offered to the "god who commanded the sacrifice" (u 'lei Shillong). [Fig. 2. The state sacrifice at Nongkrem].[1]

Now a second sacrifice begins in honor of the god u 'lei lyngdoh. A rooster is slaughtered and placed in pieces on the altar. While the new lyngdoh is letting the blood of the rooster drip on the sacrificial gifts on the altar, he shouts out: "Hey! The blood of the rooster! Hurrah!"

The sacrifice is completed. Coolies pack up the sacrifical meat into the baskets that were

[1] [See category 116, p. 12--Analyst]

782 brought along and push the sacrificial gifts to
• 793 one side.

The new lyngdoh now gives the sign for the dance of joy. The men who are all in dancing clothes get up and seize the swords and dancing brushes they brought along. They place themselves one behind the other. The music begins and slowly the dancers move away from the place. Hopping and rocking from one leg to another, they move forward, forming a definite figure while doing it. Sometimes it is a circle, sometimes an eight, sometimes a spiral, which then slowly resolves itself. Now the dancers face each other in pairs. With loud cries each pair jumps at each other and they beat their swords together, uttering cries of joy which are seconded by the spectators. [Fig. 3. Egg throwing: placing rice]

782 798 535

Now they arrange themselves as at the beginning and the dance begins again. Thus the dance crosses the place several times, each time the peculiar dance (shad mastieh) ending with the striking together of the swords. The new lyngdoh, who has now performed his first ceremonial sacrifice which is concluded by the sword dance, declares his veneration for the god who has commanded the sacrifice. For this purpose all the men arrange themselves in order and with the lyngdoh at the head bow three times before the (invisible) god. While they are all standing, the lyngdoh takes several steps backwards and standing repeats his bow. With this the ceremony is over.

793 782

They arrange themselves in the order they came in. Dancing they go down the mountain to the hut of the lyngdoh. As soon as possible a new sacrifice [217] is offered to the u 'lei lyngdoh, the god of sacrificers. With this the new lyngdoh has officially begun his new office

*[See category 116, p 12 -- Analyst]

782 and can now also appear at the public state and
• 793 community sacrifices when any basis of relationship justifies it.

This ceremonial way of introducing lyngdohs is still the custom especially in the kingdoms of Kyrim and Nongkrem.

The number of active, official lyngdohs varies according to the region. A kingdom has at least one official lyngdoh. [Fig. 4. Egg throwing: Throwing of the egg.] [Fig. 5. Egg throwing: Investigation] But the kingdom
[796] of Nongkrem, for example, has six official lyngdohs, who together with the king and with other lyngdohs from neighboring villages annuall offer the great state sacrifice. (8) Even

8. P. Dr. Becker, S.D.S., "Die Nongkrempuja in den Khasibergen" [The Nongkrem Puja in the Khasi; Mountains], Anthropos, Vol. 4, (1909), p. 898.

villages often have their own official lyngdohs.

For the services which they perform for the people by offering sacrifices, they do not receive money or a present of money. Usually thei trouble is rewarded by natural products, such as a hen, a bottle of rice liquor or even, though more rarely, by a pig. Obviously they always have the right to participate in the sacrificial meal.

2. The Sacrifices.

a) State Sacrifices.

161 According to the report of the last census
722 the tribe of Khasi numbers about 200,000 people.
621 (9) These are not unified under one ruler, but

9. P. Dr. C. Becker, S.D.S. Im

3:Stegmiller-17 M-4,5(no date)1924 AR7Khasi AR7

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622
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Fig. 6 p. 18
[The village chief in his sacrificial coat and ornaments]

782 kingdom, thou hast given the sun and the moon,
796 for reckoning the year, so that we may have Puja once in the year, so that kings may arise, the children of the valleys may increase and thrive, the children of the Khasi, the children of the Bhoi, the children of the War, so that the sacrificial gifts may increase before the face of thine altar." (11)

11. P. Dr. Becker, S.D.S., loc. cit., p. 902 (Anthropos).

782 At these state and community sacrifices, the
793 official lyngdohs are the chief one to appear,
622 who together with the ruling king or chieftain
796 and with other lyngdohs from the villages perform the sacrifices. These annual state sacrifices are introduced and performed with great ceremony. They take place in front of the house of the s' iem sad (high priestess) of the state involved. (Fig. 2) [Fig. 6. The village chief in his sacrificial coat and ornaments]*

782 In addition to the usual sacrificial gifts,
796 which are grouped together on a small altar of earth and which consist of a banana leaf, betel nut leaves, pepper leaves, betel nuts, kpu and rynsi, fermented rice water in a gourd bottle, and oak leaves, there are chiefly hens and goats and at the end a pig. Goats are slaughtered in great numbers, so that the chief festival day of the state sacrifice is called pom blang (the goat heads) by the people.

782 Besides the slaughtering of the sacrificial
525 animals, the dance plays a chief part. At these
796 great sacrifices all the dances that are customary among the Khasi are performed: the dance [219] of the unmarried girls, the dance of the girls and men together, but both sexes are so placed that the men form an outer circle and the girls

*[See category 116, p. 17--Analyst]

/892/ The Nongkrem Puja in the Khasi Mountains (Assam) (1)

126 1. All the pictures attached to this article are prepared from photographs taken by P. Frumentius Stegmiller, S.D.S., missionary in Shillong. The photographs were in part very difficult to take as they had to be made without being observed and in some cases the day was already well advanced.

by P. Dr. C. Becker, S.D.S., Apostolic Prefect of Assam.

631 About five English miles to the east of Shillong, the chief town of the Khasi Mountains, lies the town of Nongkrem. It is the seat of the king (u S'iem) who governs the state Nongkrem of Khyrim, the largest of the 25 Khasi little states and which is partly independent (semi-independent) of the English government. Nongkrem is best 796 782 known for the great sacrifice, simply called Nongkrem Puja or also ka Pom blang-u-S'iem Nongkrem (Slaying the goat of the S'iem of Nongkrem) which takes place there annually. This festivity offers, as little else does, an instructive insight into the religious and social views and customs of this interesting mountain people and should therefore be given a concise description, which may be divided into three parts:

I. The Preparations for the Sacrificial Feast.

II. The Sacrificial Feast.

III. The Celebration that Follows.

I. The Preparations for the Sacrificial Feast

793 643 Just as matriarchy prevails in the family among the Khasi so a similar arrangement has been kept in the management of the Khasi state, Nongkrem. In the state the S'iem is not the actual head but a high priestess, called ka S'iem sād. Sād means the divinity which watches over the royal race. The temporal government is transferred by the S'iem sad to the S'iem; he acts as her authorized agent although independent in his decisions working with his advisers, whose advice he must obtain in matters of importance. The moneys of the kingdom

are kept by the S'iem sīd. Everything that comes in, such as taxes, market contributions, or that which comes in through the administration of justice must be given to her. She may dispose of it as she sees best, while the S'iem receives from her the money necessary for paying the costs of the government. 793 643

The S'iem sīd is the sole authority in matters of religion. She must watch over the religious sacrifices and determine the time and place for them; /facing p. 892 Fig. 1.[1] The Sacrifice (Nongkrem Puja) among the Khasi/ /893/ the state sacrifices are held in her house or in front of her house, and they must be performed in her presence. The actual S'iam is her son or nephew or even more distant male relative, who is chosen by the "state council," the Mentris.

After the death of the S'iem sīd, this office passes to her oldest living daughter, and lacking such to the eldest daughter of her eldest daughter, and lacking such granddaughters to the oldest daughter, and so forth. In case there are no daughters or granddaughters, the oldest living sister takes the office; if there are no sisters, then the oldest daughter of the oldest sister of the mother of the deceased S'iem sīd is the successor, and so it goes further. In this way the office always remains within the royal lineage.

In the house of the S'iem sīd (called ka-iīng sīd), which is one of the largest and most attractive in the Khasi Hills, there is a post in the middle which reaches from the floor to the ridge of the roof. It is called u rishot Blei (post, pillar of god) and serves at the same time as the altar before which many sacrifices are performed. The pillar is nothing other than the trunk of the Khasi oak (ka dieng sning; botanical name: castanopsis sp.), which is holy to the Khasi. If the house of the S'iem sīd burns down, or if it is built up anew, a new pillar must be brought. Only certain families (jaid) have the privilege of cutting down the trees for this purpose. As soon as it is cut down, dancing and music begins; the trunk is covered with a cloth and carried away on a carrying frame. Hundreds of persons participate in this. As long as the pillar is not set up, it is guarded night and day. A person or an animal might jump over it and that would be sang (=, taboo): the trunk would be defiled and another tree would have to be cut down. If something dreadful happens in the kingdom, or if a danger threatens, the S'iem sīd goes with six official sacrificial priests of the kingdom Nongkrem before the post and offers sacrifice there in order to avert the evil. 778 782 796 [824]

The foregoing has to be mentioned in order to give a better understanding of the following.

The Nongkrem Puja usually takes place in the month of May. 796 782

[1] [see category 116, p.14 - - - Analyst]

613 bakla); and as long as the expiatory sacrifice, in the form of pigs and
688 goats, determined by the elders of the family and by the sacrificial
682 priest (lyngdoh) has not been offered, the sinning member is considered excluded from the family and the family sacrifices. But even after being accepted again a certain stain still clings to him.

613 But it is also the duty of the clan mother to care for the needs of the members of her family clan with regard to food, clothing, and the like. She divides the fruits of the harvests according to the needs of the individual. She goes or sends to market to trade, to buy, or to sell. She takes care of the common purse and even the masculine members of the clan have to ask her for money when they wish to drink rice liquor or buy clothing. There the clan mother is generous
[662] rather than niggardly. This dependent relationship of the men is not considered unworthy at all or shameful. It is the matriarchal form and ancient custom. Nevertheless, the position of the men in the family clan is an esteemed one. Even the name they are called by has an important sound: Rangbah Shaan (oldest ones, advisers). On them falls often the work in the field and wood or the protection of the family; bow and arrow are handed to them as cradle gifts. In the more important family matters the clan mother consults with them. At the giving of the name, during a wedding, a funeral, or cremation the clan mother steps almost completely into the background, also during quarrels and court hearings before the chief (Dolol) or king (S'iem). She is still always influential with her advice, but the actual appearance, activity and judgments is the business of the men. The smaller,
[782] everyday sacrifices she performs in the clan hut; but she can also let these /135/ be performed by her sons. At larger sacrificial ceremonies which are offered by several family clans at the same time, by whole
[793] villages or even by one of the Khasi states, only the men are active as sacrificial priests.

613 With regard to the husbands of the clan mother and of the feminine
596 members, they are not considered members of the family clan of the women at all. They are only considered the begetters. They work and live in their own clan, participate in their sacrifices and burial places. The father has no further influence in the raising of the children, who belong entirely to the clan of the mother. But usually they have no obligation, unless the wife and children are impoverished. Even then their care comes in second place after that of members of their own
[593] clan. Nevertheless the husband is honored and is addressed by "Mr." (kynrad) by his wife. She would consider it disgraceful to approach him impertinently. Where the property of a clan has been dissolved or Christian customs introduced, the husband lives and works together with his wife and children.

Ik Chatopadhyay E-4, 5 (no date) 1941 AR7 Khasi AR7

divides equally. U Subu Rai explained that each house counted as a separate unit. Thus if Ka Jem, Ka Jin and all their daughters were alive, the married daughters who lived in a separate house, namely, Ka Laimon, Ka Laibon, Ka Aimon and Ka Hoiman of Ka Jem's house, and Ka Phre of Ka Jin's line, would each get a share. But Ka Jem and her Ka Khadduh Ka Aibon who lives in the mother's house would get only one share. So would Ka Jin, Ka Eiribon and the unmarried daughters of the latter. The descendants of Ka Lung would get seven equal shares for distribution to each house, and not two shares first, divided later into shares corresponding to the number of daughters for Ka Jem's and Ka Jin's house. The manager does not get any share of the collections. Authority in the management of the ancestral property therefore passes from one male to another, in the extended family, and the Kur, in a manner which necessitates a clear distinction of seniority and juniority of brothers, among themselves and also of sisters with regard to brothers.

The case of succession is similar. Gurdon notes that the Siemship in Mylliem State passes from a man to his next brother, and "failing such brothers, by the eldest of his sisters' sons; failing such nephews by the eldest of the sons of his sisters' daughters; failing such grand nephews by the eldest of the sons of his mother's sisters" and so forth in the female line. In Nongkrem, the son or similar male relative of the High Priestess becomes by delegation a Siem. The office of the High Priestess passes from a woman to her eldest surviving daughter; and failing daughters to the eldest daughter of her eldest daughter; failing daughters of her eldest daughter, to the eldest daughter of her second daughter, and so on. This is the customary line of succession, and is stated by Gurdon to be "uniform in all cases" practically.

Neither levirate, nor sororate are practised by the Khasis. Widows are stated (G) quite often not to remarry if there are daughters. There is no question of the control of the property

[P 110B]
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another. In other words, a state is not a fixed territorial entity. In the early twentieth century, the most populous of the 25 chiefdoms, Khyrim, contained 30,833 persons occupying 7,839 houses in 372 villages, and the least populous, Nongkwai, contained 240 persons occupying 53 houses in 3 villages. Fifteen of the chiefdoms were headed by a *syiem* (chief), three by a *lyngdoh* (priest), six by a *sirdar*, and one by a *wahadadar*. These leaders all had executive and judicial functions, but a chief's authority was limited in that he had to obtain the approval of his executive council before acting. The other leaders were subject to a similar limitation. A chief maintained a small police force. His major sources of revenue were market tolls, fines, and, more recently, income from licenses to distill rice whisky. Succession to a ruling role in the larger states traditionally involved election by members of a lineage that had a hereditary right to elect, from among members of a lineage that had the hereditary right to rule. In British times, the elective basis was broadened, differentially in the various states, even to the point of popular elections. [Cf. Aitchison 1931; Lyngdoh 1962.] **Social stratification.** The three classes of lineage are the nobles, the commoners, and the slaves or servants. This stratification applies only to the recruitment to office in the native-state system, for there is no hypergamy, and in a village assembly everyone has equal voice. The noble lineages have the hereditary right to fill from among their male members roles such as village or state priest, councilor to a chief, or elector of a chief. The few lineages which today are remembered as slave or servant lineages had the inherited obligation to render special services to a chief's household. There is no Khasi term for "commoner." Every lineage other than a noble or a slave lineage is a commoner lineage, and the commoner lineages are in the majority. **Warfare.** Warfare was suppressed by the British, and little is known for certain about its traditional forms. The tactics which confronted the British were the ambush and the guerrilla raid. Traditional goals included taking heads from other Khasis and capturing women from the valleys.

RELIGION. **Major and indigenous religions.** A Welsh Calvinistic Methodist missionary penetrated into Cherrapunji in 1832, and the work that he began continues to this day. His society, which has since become the Welsh Presbyterian Foreign Mission, introduced writing, village primary schools, a high school, a theological seminary, and a hospital. Competing missionaries followed, and by 1914 some Shillong Khasis were puzzling over the tenets not only of traditional Hinduism and Islam but also of the Buddhists, Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, and Unitarians (Roy 1914). By the 1920s, missionaries of the Church of God and the Seventh Day Adventists were

household deities, and nameless and smaller deities. 776
Deities of the first two categories are simply aspects 971
of the high God or Goddess. • The earth is peopled with two great orders of land demons and water demons who cause all undesirable, unnatural, and otherwise inexplicable events, acting either on their own or as instruments in the hands of sorcerers. Apart from omens, both in nature and in dreams, 787
Khasis attach supernatural significance also to mystic 812
numbers, and to the colors white, black, and red. They hold especially important folk beliefs regarding 824
betel nut, paddy rice, gold and silver, and clothing.
Practitioners. The two classes of religious practition- 791
ers are the village or state priests and the sacrificers. 793 •
Both are male. They use the same divinatory tech- 754
niques of reading broken eggshells and the entrails of cocks, and they both sacrifice cocks, hens, goats, pigs, and cattle. Their skills are not taught to them so much as picked up by observation and confirmed by demonstrations of efficacy. A priest is elected from among the men of his sib to direct his skills to the public good until he dies, and his rewards are institutionalized and come from the village or the state. A sacrificer acts for private persons or his groups, on call, and is rewarded by them personally with gifts in cash or in kind. The sacrificer is called upon to explain and then to ritually remedy every variety of misfortune, especially illness, though his powers are nowadays regarded with ambivalence, and he is widely expected to become a sorcerer sooner or later. • There are two major types of sor- 754
cerer. One is the ritual specialist or sacrificer who secretly turns his skills from good to evil, manipulating demons to injure a person or his group, and acting always for himself alone out of considerations of jealousy or revenge. The other is normally a leading citizen, a woman who is so wealthy and successful that it is believed that she must keep a thlen, i.e. a creature which will bring her prosperity as long as she feeds it periodically with human blood. To provide this blood, the men of her household, or other males whom she bewitches with a special whisky, will indiscriminately murder anyone except a mem- [184]
ber of her matrilineage. The Jaintias have an analogue to the thlen in their tara, except that the ultimate result is death from illness rather than murder. Minor witchcraft can be perpetrated by poison keepers or persons with an evil eye, who are often women. **Ceremonies.** The important traditional 845
ceremonies were the life-crisis rituals relating to 844
pregnancy and childbirth, the naming of a child, and 852
death. Lesser ceremonies related to marriage and 764
divorce, and to housebuilding. All these rituals were
addressed primarily to the ancestors, and they are
still performed in modified form by many Khasis.
Other rituals, which were performed by groups such 178
as villages, sibs, local descent groups, or households, were addressed to the unnamed aspects of the high 782

17: Banerjee E-5 (1955) 1962 AR7 Khasi AR / Smit

THE KHASI FESTIVAL OF 'POMBLANG'

S. BANERJEE

INTRODUCTION

The Khasi inhabit the upland of the central part of the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills district of Assam. They reckon descent through mother and the youngest daughter (Ka khaddah) of the house is the custodian of the ancestral property. Belief in the existence of spirits is strong among them and the causes of diseases are ascertained by taking recourse to the process of divination. They are ruled by different categories of Chief. The *Siem* is the highest official responsible for the administration of the state but a few small states are also governed by *Sirdars* with same powers as vested in the former although does not possess the same status. It is interesting to note that their priest whose rank is next to *Siem*, have also been allotted to perform this secular duties in some of the regions of the Khasi country. The Chief function through their respective council comprising elected members from different administrative units. He is rather subservient to this body as he is liable to be censured or even dismissed, if his activities are not in conformity with the Khasi traditional usage. Most of his directives are implemented through the assistance of his subordinates who are in-charge of various sections of the State. The Khasi place his grievance first to these junior officers for redress and justice, after which an appeal can be preferred to the *Siem* or any other higher officer as the case may be. One of the eminent States of the Khasi people known as Khyriem, where this festival is celebrated, consists of eight units for administrative convenience under the supervision of different grades of officials who participated in this celebration along with the *Siem* as representatives of the people.

The Khasi festival of *Pomblang* (Goat killing) described below used to be celebrated at one time in Shillong when the Khasi states of Khyriem and Myliem were not separated. The first chief of the Khyriem state U Singh Manik shifted his headquarters to Nongkrem village after partition of the kingdom, which occured before the arrival of the British. He again moved to Laneksrdem after a brief stay at the village of Lyngshing. He performed this festival as long as he was there, transferring it again to Nongkrem where he re-settled again. It was celebrated here for a long time and consequently it was named after this village. Although the ruling family had later on shifted its residence about sixty years ago to the present village Smit, during the time of U Khur Singh, Siem, it is performed regularly as *Nongkrem dance* which was observed by the author from 21st June to 25th June, 1955.

OBJECT OF THE FESTIVAL

It is being held every year since the days of U Shillong who was supposed to be the founder of original Khyriem State. They celebrate it to perpetuate his memory and pay homage with a view to ensure rain, good harvest, eliminating diseases and famine. He was worshipped along with other ancestors with view to guide the present Chief in his discharge of his duties and for the welfare of the people.

The house of Siem (iing-sad) where the rites are observed, is considered sacred. It consists of a big-hall (shlur) in the centre, surrounded by rooms. One of these on the north is used as a kitchen room (iing-chetja) where ritual

17: Banerjee E-5 (1955) 1962 AR7 Khasi AR7
Smit

778 796 objects are stored while that of the west (kynram blang) was meant exclusively for sacrificial goats. There is a very big circular courtyard in front of the building where the members of the royal family as also other boys and spinsters [793] [443] [202] hold a ritual dance. The function is always held during the moonlit period of May or June and the actual dates are fixed in consultation with the Chief priest (*Sohblei*) in such a way that the first day—*Pamtiah** always coincides with the market day of Shillong Chota Bazar. The dates of the festival is then communicated to the in-charge of different units of his territory, through a wooden stick '*kyrwoh*' having a few knots of cane-strips, as a form of summons for attending the festival for five days at Smit along with subjects under their jurisdiction.

Important Participant

796 793 562 [769] [533] The responsibility of performing this ritual rests on the High-priestess (*Ka Siem Sad*) who is succeeded by her eldest daughter. Different ritual objects are procured by her, well in advance and it is obligatory on her part to join the ceremonial dancing, in which her daughter may also officiate on her behalf. U Shillong is worshipped by the chief priest while the other ancestors are invoked by lesser priests. The musicians (*Dhulia*) besides their normal duties, take part in the worship of the ancestors and they are presented with silk turban, jacket, cloth, by the ruling family for the services rendered during the festival. The *Siem* has no especial role except to supervise and evoke U Shillong for the welfare of the community. He is required to perform certain sacrifices, failing which his heir-apparent (*Siem kynnah*) does the same. He along with his sister (High priestess) abstain from taking rice during the period of celebration presumably to observe the sanctity of this festival as also to ensure the successful conclusion of the function.

Ritual Materials

796 782 231 The festival derives its name from the sacrifice of a large number of goats some of which were supplied from the State fund and from different units of the territory. Formerly at least fifty goats were required and each unit had a specific allotment but owing to the economic difficulty that the Khasi are experiencing, the number of goats sacrificed hardly exceeds twenty-five. The goats collected from the different units, are presented to the Chief at the midnight [273] [276] of the third day. Rice-beer, dried fish, fermented-rice, betel leaves together with nuts are also important ritual objects in this celebration.

Description of the Festival

796 782 The commencement of the festival was marked by the distribution of dried, fish (suit dokha) to the persons assembled on the occasion, in the evening of *Pamtiah* (*i.e.* 21st June, 1957). This was followed by the dropping of rice-beer by the Chief priest over the fire place of central hall known as ***Ka suit-ka shor***

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[805] *A week consists of eight days in Khasi Calender the names are according to the places where markets are held in Khasi Hills.

	Name	Market
1.	Pamtiah	Shillong Chota Bazar.
2.	Umni	Cherrapunji.
3.	Yew-iuh	Shillong Burra Bazar.
4.	Lyngka	Barapani.
5.	Nongkrem	Nongkrem.
6.	Mawlong	Laban (Shillong).
7.	Rynghep	Cherrapunji Chota Bazar.
8.	Shillong	Laitlyng hut.

17: Banerjee E-5 (1955) 1962 AR7 Khasi AR7
Smit

in which no sacrifice was made except this libation of this liquor in the name of U Shillong, Ka Blei Long Siem and U Suidnia. Subsequently, the Chief musician (Dhulia) worshipped another deity Ka Synchar, by holding a yellow cook in front of ritual offerings collected on a plantain leaf while his subordinates immediately shouted nine times in their traditional way. Redistribution of dry-fish and indigenous liquor to the people marked and the end of the first day and the ceremonies performed on this day were repeated on the second day (Umni). 796 782

The sacrifice of goats which was an important feature of the festival, was performed in the afternoon of the third day (Yew duh) on the top of an adjacent hill where the *Siem* along with other members of his house, went there in a procession. The people shouted all the time while it was proceeding to that place. The musicians went round the altar first at the top of the hill thrice in anticipation of a happy and good auguers. The Chief priest facing the north, prayed to U Shillong holding a red-coloured cock in his right hand and killed it on the altar collecting its blood in a gourd vessel. The entrails of the cock were carefully examined by him and then kept on a silver plate. The Chief priest threw some grains of rice before him as also over the yellow goat and prayed to U Shillong holding a *dah* in his hand. He then passed on this implement to the *Siem* who also prayed to the deity. The *Siem* handed over the same to a man (nengnong) who sacrificed the goat on behalf of the *Siem*. He collected nine pieces of meat from different parts of the goats body (*e.g.* heart, lungs, liver, stomach, kidney, etc.) and handed them over to the priest. The latter cut each piece of the meat into five parts and offered them to the five ancestors.* The procession returned to the Siem's residence when the head of the goat was brought back by a member of a Kharbamen clan. It was then given to the High-priestess for disposal of the same in a manner as she liked. The day's rituals were completed by performing the goat presentation ceremony in the midnight. The Chief musician stood very near the fire made in this occasion at the verhandah (tyngkong) of the building and called the names of different units to present their gifts, in order of their seniority. The gathering that was watching from the courtyard shouted in their traditional way three times on receipt of the *Siem's* acceptance and the animals were led to the *kynram-hang* for overnight stay before which they were not considered fit to be sacrificed to be held on the day next.

On the evening of the fourth day (Lyngka) betel leaves and nuts were presented to the members of the *Siem's* family by the people wishing them happiness and prosperity. The chief priest took his seat in front of the verhandah in a line along with his ten assistants who were on either side in a group of five facing the north. The Chief priest worshipped U Blei Shillong and Ka Blei-Long Siem and the responsibility of invoking each ancestor or ancestress was devolved on each assistant priest : [769] [793]

Asstt. Priest	Chief Priest	Asstt. Priest
1. U Dienger. 2. U Marshan. 3. U Ram Shillong. 4. Ka Phan Siem Shillong. 5. U Biskorom.	6. U Shillong. 7. Ka Blei Long Siem.	8. U Phan Kynthei. 9. U Shynrang. 10. Ka Lei Duwan. 11. Ka Siem Sngi. 12. Ka Blei Synchar.

* (1) U Blei Shillong (2) U Suidnia (3) U Kpa & U Kha
(4) U Bhakraw Basaw (5) U Bakri Shako

After Lingodh H.—The Pomblang Nongkrem (in Khasi) 1946. Khasi & Jaintia Hills Press, Shillong.